

What Ails Spoken English in Engineering Class Rooms? A Diagnosis and Remedy

Dr. Lakshmi Kakumanu

English Department

K G Reddy College of Engineering and Technology, Hyderabad

Abstract- The onset of the twenty first century is marked by rapid globalization, privatization and industrial revolution. It has also witnessed superfast development in information and communication technology. Now, Indians are coming out with flying colours in every walk of life and are making the world to believe in their incredible multifaceted genius. This is a time when we, as a nation are fast advancing towards a united and integrated corporate world of today. But this is one side of the coin; the other side shows the stark reality that nearly seventy percent of our people are still living in rural and semi-urban areas. The field of their activity is stretched within a circle of fifteen to twenty mile radius with their own village as its centre. These people are either illiterate or semi-literate. Here, due to large size the geographical diversities are combined with diversities of language, social structure and culture. They are satisfied with their traditional way of living, using their 'mother-tongue' as a means of communication. As a result India is confronted with a real threat of an increased socioeconomic stratification. Of late, the centre and the state governments have encouraged the establishment of higher education centres at rural and semi-urban areas but because of low literacy, shortage of resources, poor infrastructure facilities-and ill-equipped classes the students are forced to face the real dilemma of their life, when in these classes they come in contact with spoken or functional English they find themselves unable handle the situation as they cannot use appropriate spoken English skills.

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the present study is to investigate and evaluate the common core process of English language learning as an integral part of academic course right from the aims and objectives of instituting the course to the designing of the syllabus, the process of teaching and learning, the academic and non-academic environment, and the final outcome at the end of the studies in terms of capabilities of students to use English for both academic and employment purpose. As results indicate, the scenario is not very encouraging, but very few have taken such trouble to probe into the causes of lassitude and suggest ways and means of remedying the situation by improvement and alternative solution. The relevance and significance of the study cannot be overemphasized as it is a crucial phase of education, which decides the future state of students both for education and employment. The objective of the present paper is to identify prominent factors accountable for the lack of spoken English proficiency among students in rural and semi-urban colleges and also to recommend certain policy-measures that are urgently required to be initiated to cope up with the problem of spoken English in the concerned are; The major obstacle in learning speaking English is the multi-linguistic pattern of India. We should not be ignored practical side of the issues that English is one of the major vehicles of the culture of the modern world. In this regard Humayun Kabir, a reputed educationist, opines - "each nation must learn to move outside its narrow orbit and establish channels of communication with other. There is perhaps in the present world better means of such communication than English".

A number of commissions and committees viz. Wood's Despatch Commission (recommended bilingual formula) Central Advisory Board with the approval of Chief Minister's Conference 1961, "recommended three tier system), The University Education Commission, The Secondary Education Commission. The Kun Committee etc. have tried their best to solve this language issue but still, except the elite few, majorly general masses are facing the zig-saw puzzle of this language problem for the singular reason that English is isolated from the social context in rural and semi-urban areas. Such isolation and abstraction of the learner is enough create several interferences with the spoken language learning process.

Next obstacle is concerned with the ill-equipped classrooms. There too much emphasis is laid on the text books. The improvement in students thought and expression is systematically ignored. Our teachers seldom realize the importance of spoken drill exercises. There has been (and still it is prevalent) a sort of antithesis up

between English and the mother tongue, it being wrongly supposed that if the former is emphasized latter suffers. Besides, less emphasis is laid on the language while teaching practical subjects like maths and science. Students too, engrain this wrong and misleading notion that t

hey are students of science and not of language. They become careless towards functional uses of language. This carelessness does not only on poor learning of the language but also their spoken skills get dull. Besides, the classroom anxiety too, plays equal significant role in the spoken English classes. Nearly 60% of students think that the other students in their class speak better than them. They get confused and nervous when they speak in the class. Many others face that of being laughed at while speaking English in the class rooms. Not only class rooms, but also homes are not able to provide suitable atmosphere of speaking English as number of parents advise their kids to spend more time in their core subject studies. This is due to the same reason stated above that the parents think that the future prospect of their children depends on subjects such as physics, chemistry, mathematics, and all engineering subjects and therefore they don't stress on the importance of spoken English.

Again, English learning in India is essentially instrumental in nature for Indians use it largely for instrumental reasons without surrendering their unique multilingual and multicultural identity. It is very interesting to note that in India English is perceived only as an academic and economic ladder. Thus, motivational orientation factor works very feebly in rural and semi-urban areas where the desired medium of instruction at various levels is not essentially English. It would not be wrong to infer that English does not find favour as a medium of instruction at the lower levels of schooling in these areas. As Navneeta Deb Sen observes, "People generally confuse two issues, namely, learning English as a subject and using English as a medium of instruction. These two issues must be kept separate. I strongly feel that English should be taught as a subject from class-I to all children, whereas the medium of instruction should be mother-tongue of the learners. There is no doubt that there is a strong relationship between the English language and the acquisition of status and power in society". Professor Pabitra Sarkar, Vice Chancellor, Rabindra Bharti University, Calcutta, holds the opinion that, "English should never be introduced at the primary level. However, the idea is not to do away with English. Our century old experience with teaching English for about fourteen years, i.e., beginning with class-I and ending with a degree course has yielded very little result so far".

These opinions, unless synchronized with radical changes in our schooling system, will only lead to the perpetuation of the status quo not only in the rural and semi-urban areas but also in India as a whole. It is only the existing elite that will require significantly high levels of proficiency in spoken English and will thus continue the appreciation of prestigious and powerful jobs in society. It is also to be noted that in the above proposals there is hardly any potential for social change. We also feel that these proposals mitigate against the multilingual ethos of our country. If the problem is to-be weeded out, we should be aware of the fact that the teaching of spoken English in India has a variety of status e.g. second language, foreign language, or as a medium of instruction but not the language of the masses or lingua-franca, therefore, various approaches are needed to teach spoken English in different areas. Broadly speaking these approaches stand classified into two categories:

- (a) The Structural view.
- (b) Communicative view.

In the structural view the impact of teaching is not determined by the importance of the language to the users, but by the strict rules of its grammar. These structures all so arranged and conveyed (e.g. from simple to complex), that the learner steadily increases his mastery over the spoken linguistic systems. The communication approach includes concept of time, sequence and location. It deals with request, denials, offers, complaints etc. But, spoken English competence means both the grammatical knowledge and ability to use this knowledge to perform different kinds of functions such as 'arguing, requesting, inviting, agreeing, disagreeing, accepting, declining, describing or reporting. To quote Leonard New Mark; "A person even an intelligent one, perfectly knowing the linguistic structures, may not know to get his cigarette lit up by a stranger, has to walk up to him and ask 'do you have a light?' Or 'got a match'? Thus, while paying attention to various approaches of spoken English stress should be given on the social context in which a language is both learned and practiced it.

Not only linguists but also psychologists and educationists are aware of the possibilities of learning spoken English in a social context. They have realized that isolation and abstraction of spoken skills of the

learner from the social context, creates several interference with the language learning process. Hence, spoken language competence is multi-faceted. It is a grammatical competence or the linguistic competence, the socio-linguistic competence with other uses of language in the social context. In the spoken English learning classes the role of a competent teacher cannot be denied for teaching is a modification, motivation, encouragement, stimulation and elevation exercise. Thus, it can be inferred that a teacher plays many fold roles to facilitate spoken communication among the participants in the class. He acts as an independent participant within the group. Next, he plays the role of a researcher and learner with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities and natural observed experiences. His familiarity with the learner's background enables him to pick up dialogues from the learner's environment itself, for instance:

- A. Hello! How are you?
- B. Fine, how are you.
- C. I am better.
- D. You did not come yesterday.
- E. Yes, I was sick.

And so the conversation or the spoken language bits can be used to build up dialogues, the teacher may direct the variation and thus help the students in enhancing their spoken skills in the prevailing social context.

Next, time learner should be allowed to speak without the fear of appraisal. That's how they will feel motivated in learn speaking skills. They may also be guided to participate in informal communicational exercises either through free dialogue, role playing, conversation, discussion, debate, visual cues, taped cues, pictures and sentence fragments to intricate conversation with a minimum of help and guidance by the teacher. The teacher should also make constant efforts to organize the classroom as a tool for communicative activities and the learning material should therefore be designed according to the needs of the learners. This may be done informally and personally through one-to-one session with the participants, in which the teacher talks through such issues as the student's perception of his or her learning style, learning assets and learning goals. He exemplifies himself as an effective communicator, seeking to maximize the meshing of speaker's intention and hearer's interpretation, through the use of paraphrase, confirmation and feedback.

II. CONCLUSION

In order to promote communicative competence among students various kinds of other functional communicative activities and social interaction activities are suggested e.g. lectures, small-and large-group discussion, books, imaginative storytelling, singing, pair work, individualized projects, inventories, checklists and programme of instruction etc. These activities are monitored under the basic premise that real life situation of students' copulation needs to be analyzed in their social context. The teacher is therefore suggested to explore those numerous linguistic functions, the students employ while carrying out their daily life functions e.g. creating, carrying out instructions, giving instructions etc.

The prospect of future advancement for rural and semi-urban area learners, and for the students of science, technology, medicine, management or computers etc.; all the social and educational functions should be clearly identified. Even the learners should be encouraged in every possible way to communicate in English where teacher will not just be a pedagogue but a facilitator for acquiring spoken English competence.

REFERENCES

- [1] Second Language Acquisition: Sociolinguistic and Socio-Cultural Aspects of English in India. New Delhi: Sage Publications
- [2] Principles and practices of language learning and teaching; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice hall Brown, h Douglas (1994).
- [3] Communication and Interaction Networks (Myosre, Central Institute of Indian Languages), PP. 59-71. Chaudron, Craig (1995).
- [4] Second language classrooms, Cambridge: Cambridge University press Chomsky, N. (1988), Language and Problems of Knowledge (Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press).
- [5] Communicative language teaching, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Mackley, W.F.(1965)
- [6] Radhakrishnan Commission (1940), Ram, T. (1988); Trading in Language: The story of English in India (Delhi, GDK Publishers) Report of Secondary Education Commission, 1953: p.68
- [7] Report of the Secondary Education Commission (1953), which is popularly known as Mudaliar Committee Report of the University Education Commission, Page 329
- [8] The recommendations of the Education Commission (1964-66) headed by Dr. D. S. Kothari and Dr. J. P. Naik, the government records, provided in www.aponline.gov.in
- [9] The National Council of Teacher Education published a document on practice teaching (NTTE, 1979) The Report of University Education Commission popularly known as Radhakrishnan Commission (1949) 225